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bition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings will be sent out next autumn and the juries to accept pictures and to judge which shall be the prize-worthy canvases will be announced.

The Corcoran distributes three medals and a certificate of honorable mention, but next winter a substantial sum of money will be added to each from this Clark largess. Thus the gold medal will be accompanied by two thousand dollars, the silver by fifteen hundred, the bronze by one thousand and the honorable mention by five hundred. Senator Clark has come to the aid of the Corcoran in former years; indeed the present gift increases his donations to thirty-one thousand dollars in all. A noteworthy collection the Seventh Corcoran is likely to prove.

A "NEW" DEFINITION OF POETRY

To the Editor of THE ART WORLD:

Of all the sexless vaporings anent poetry which have of late obscured the heaven of sanity, none surely are as pitifully inept as those of one Maxwell Bodenheim in an article in *The New Republic* for December 22, entitled: "What Is Poetry?" A correspondent of *The Little Review*, a "new poetry" magazine for which Mr. Bodenheim writes, describes the gentleman as follows: "As for Bodenheim, he is bone ignorant. . . . Bodenheim simply doesn't know any literature, foreign or English."

These remarks are excellent as far as they go, but they are too charitably expressed and they understate the case. As a matter of fact Mr. Bodenheim has a small fund of misinformation which keeps him from being entirely negligible.

This statement may be illustrated by such a quotation as the following from Mr. Bodenheim's article: "Wordsworth was the first poet of any proportions to turn the content of poetry into a definite channel." This is not, as it first appears, pure nonsense, though it is of course principally that. We shall not do our entire duty by asking Mr. Bodenheim whether he has ever heard of Sophokles or Vergil or Dante or Milton or Goethe. Perhaps Mr. Bodenheim is not so much ignorant as he is wrong-headed. From other indications in his article it is apparent that he thinks poetry can be only individual, never collective. Take the passage "the striving toward poetry had not resolved itself to a definite art but had become a fixed form into which any kind of content might be poured." Mr. Bodenheim has no use for Homer or popular ballads, if he has ever heard of either. He denies the title of poetry to the traditional verse which more or less unconsciously expresses the ideals of a people or an age. But he would be equally intolerant of such individual geniuses as we have named because they show "the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure." No; Hamlet (or Shakespeare) is quite wrong; poetry can only result from the reaction of the world on the artist as an individual!

We may pass over the utter absurdity of this final conclusion, as over the fact that, even if it be true, there were plenty of important poets before Wordsworth on whom the world reacted individually: *e. g.*, Sappho, Catullus, Walther von der Vogelweide, Villon, Herrick, Bellman; not to mention the finest of all such reactions—Shakespeare in

the songs. We need also but passingly allude to Mr. Bodenheim's conception of Browning as a poet who "threw aside the 'must be a reflection of human nature' tradition and, to make such of his poems clear as paintings, mingled them with the reactions of his soul." In this interpretation Mr. Bodenheim fairly outdoes his previous blunder about Wordsworth. Imagine Browning, the deepest-hearted of the Victorians, throwing away the "must be a reflection of human nature" tradition.

But let us approach Mr. Bodenheim's own theory. He informs us "what poetry really is, is still as hazy to poets and laymen as it always has been." Prepare for the great revelation from the lips of the new Moses, aged twenty-four! Here it is: "Pure poetry is the vibrant expression of everything clearly delicate and unattached with surface sentiment in the emotions of men toward themselves and nature." Are we all so much wiser? But here as before we shall do well not to dismiss Mr. Bodenheim as "fool simple." He is rather more vicious, of course, in his futile way, than he at first appears. Take the elucidation of his theory: "True poetry is the entering of delicately imaginative plateaus, unconnected with human beliefs or fundamental human feelings." Why not say "wrenched away from the solid basis of reality?" But after all, this is totally unoriginal, mere "art for art's sake" tradition muddingly expressed. No wonder Mr. Bodenheim has no use for the poetry of the past, established as it is on the dictum of Aristotle: Art is the imitation of nature.

But the supreme error of Mr. Bodenheim is still to be considered. His desire is evidently to do in language what can only be done, or can at least be much better done, in music. To be sure the music which is vulgarly considered great—that of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner—is very deeply connected with human beliefs and fundamental human feelings. However, thanks to the moderns, the other kind of music exists too, and Mr. Bodenheim is hereby recommended to devote himself to the study of Debussy. Language is the wrong medium for those of Mr. Bodenheim's cult; it is essentially meant to express universal ideas and feelings, so that it rebels against being denatured. This is doubtless why Mr. Bodenheim finds his type of "poetry" difficult to write; it is hard to volatilize away all the honest meaning from words in the English language. But take the more indefinite and ephemeral art of music, remove its normally compelling elements (*i. e.*, its regular rhythm and its architectonic balance) and we shall have a medium just suited to the spirit of Mr. Bodenheim. No semblance of a belief, an idea or a reflection of life to trouble him!

But what all this while does the word "poetry" mean? Our Greek tells us it means a "doing," which would not commonly be interpreted to mean the puffing of an opium pipe but an energetic act of some kind. Frankly, Mr. Bodenheim strikes one as perfectly unmasculine. To say that he is effeminate would be to disparage a sex nearly all the members of which have stronger, more virile qualities than he would care to own. Nor can we associate with Mr. Bodenheim the healthy and vigorous qualities of the animal. Suppose, then, we let this peculiar individual off with the attribute hermaphroditic?

Charles Wharton Stork